



## Housing as public health:

### Using housing to prevent human trafficking and support survivors

#### Populations Affected by Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is a present concern in Louisville with 188 child trafficking incidents reported in Jefferson County between 2013 and 2019 and over 800 cases reported across Kentucky since 2007.<sup>1,2</sup>

The populations affected are diverse and include all genders. The highest percentages, however, are found among female teens as well as LGBTQ youth who lack resources and are drawn towards propositions of support that are both fraudulent and exploitative.<sup>3,4</sup>

Unhoused and runaway youth face some of the highest rates of trafficking. An estimated 1 in 6 endangered runaway children reported to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children were victims of sex trafficking.<sup>5</sup> In a study by anti-trafficking group Polaris, two thirds of trafficking survivors reported being homeless or experiencing unstable housing when they were recruited, and almost half of crisis assistance requests to their national trafficking hotline were for emergency shelter.<sup>6</sup> Four out of ten unhoused youth in shelters in Kentuckiana identified as being trafficked.<sup>7</sup>

#### Housing as a Preventative Tool

Research shows strong consensus that stable, supportive housing along with the presence of a caring adult are two of the most pressing unmet needs in the fight against human trafficking.<sup>8,9</sup> Many trafficked youth have had some experience with abuse, involvement in the child welfare system, and at least one out-of-home placement in the foster care system.<sup>2,10,11</sup> However, when teens have access to a youth-serving homeless shelter they are significantly less likely to be trafficked.<sup>4</sup> Prevention of trafficking requires not only an increase in housing options, but also stronger social support for low-income families, foster care youth, and LGBTQ populations.

Concurrently, support is needed for those exiting a trafficking situation with after care housing and social support.<sup>4,5</sup> Trafficking survivors often experience challenges related to housing that are specific to the traumas they have endured, but housing programs designed specifically with their needs in mind are rare.<sup>7,8</sup> After service care for those who have been trafficked comes in three phases: rescue, recover, and reintegration.<sup>14</sup> Housing requirements for the rescue phase may include vouchers

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for hotels or immediate temporary housing. Recovery requires an integrated program of social support, counseling, and care. Reintegration may include support for affordable housing as one works to create stability in their life. Each phase requires a distinct set of services, and support should be trauma informed to address the specific needs of the survivor. Instead, service providers often must try to match trafficking survivors with housing programs designed for other populations, like programs for domestic violence survivors, low-income households, or those experiencing homelessness. Often trafficking survivors do not neatly fit the eligibility criteria of these programs, and even when they do, the supply of affordable and available housing in these service areas is already stretched thin.<sup>7</sup>

Anti-trafficking efforts in Kentucky can be improved by increasing housing as a preventative measure and supporting those leaving a trafficking situation. Prevention requires investments in keeping vulnerable populations housed with an expansion of affordable housing programs that specifically target young women, LGBTQ youth, and youth transitioning out of foster care. For those who have been impacted by trafficking, there are not enough options for housing programs designed for their specific needs. Temporary housing, treatment housing, and support for stable, affordable housing are all pieces of the recovery process. With an expansion of housing options that both prevent and provide support for survivors, Kentucky can work to end the trauma of sex trafficking.

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